

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND “THE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP”. THE COMPLEXITY OF DEVELOPING AND ASSIMILATING A CONCEPT

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Introduction

Over time, despite the apparent simplicity, the degree of complexity of the answer to the question of what it means to be a European is growing with the evolution of the systemic structure called the European Union. Initially, for about 15 years, it was thought that the answer was simple, and overlapping a concept over a historical-geographic reality is enough to turn it into reality. In the present situation, the most important is how each person assimilates the European citizen's status. The process of conceptual assimilation must be achieved in a large number of people, large enough to enable them to form an active, stable majority, politically and civically involved (at least by systematic participation in the vote). In the absence of this majority, the resorption of the new status and the rejection processes manifested through Euroscepticism, nationalism, xenophobia or other radical forms of political or social intolerance can easily emerge.

The recent political reality showed that the assimilation of the European citizen's status is not simple. For citizens, the classical local-national-class triad has become complex enough with the expansion of the phenomenon of globalization. Due to the specific effect of generalization and abstraction, few people are aware of their membership of the “global village” and what the status of Planet Earth citizenship would represent. In contrast, due to proximity it is much easier to accept the apparent security offered by the national system of each country, and by continuity, in case of the region or locality, the sense of

belonging is much stronger from an administrative point of view. Although there is a relationship of direct proportionality between geographical or social proximity and the sense of belonging, the strongest symbol remains the national one, settled over time and historically grounded, across borders and administrative structures.

Having the national symbol at its core, each of the three statuses provides a specific role, more or less clear for the citizen. The introduction of a new element, the “European citizen”, not assimilated to any other status, has increased the degree of complexity of the awareness process and the relating to its own identity. The history of the European Union, the incoherence of the political message, the 2008 global crisis, continued the electoral propaganda while the effects of manipulation contributed to the inadequacy of the status. The consequences are observed today and start from non-assimilating the “European citizen” status to national policy-centered culminating in the BREXIT.

A brief hermeneutics of the EU history: from the CECO to a new federal state

The defense of the European Union is a historic imperative, a solution to the unresolved problems of Europe whose endless conflicts are symptomatic, culminating in the tragedy of the two world wars. The implementation of Versailles Peace Treaty (1919) was a failure, and the radical attitude of World War I winners only amplified hatred and revenge. The effect was the Second World War. It turned out that the solution which started from *President Wilson's 14 points*¹, despite openness to democracy by introducing transparency in international policies, freedom of sea movement, respecting the principle of nations, limiting armed forces and the creation of supranational structures to ensure world peace, was ineffective. The inefficiency was not

¹ *Transcript of President Woodrow Wilsons 14 Points* (1918), https://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?flash=false&page=transcript&doc=62&title=Transcript+of+President+Woodrow+Wilson+14+Points+%281918%29, 03.04.2019, 13.30 (GMT + 2).

necessarily caused by the implementation of those principles but rather by the inconsistency of application and their non-compliance.

At the end of the Second World War the question of how you can solve the European problem was still up to date. The history of modern Europe² was troubled. The territories have been transferred from one country to another without any reason other than the political-military power; migration, deportation and treatment caused changes for most of the population. All this makes any historical-administrative substantiation to be relative or challenged, and a final solution to be regarded with moral precariousness and relativism. Regardless of the historical moment, the principles³ according to which the borders of a state were established were not and cannot be considered absolute. Not only the historical variations or the geopolitical context but also different conceptual foundations underline the impossibility of identifying the "universal rule" and, failing that, increases the degree of difficulty in peaceful settlement of the problems.

The failure of Versailles Peace Treaty and the outbreak of the Second World War highlighted the fact that the solution after the First World War was not the right one. The signing of a peace agreement before the elimination of the German armed forces, the economic and military pressures on Germany, and the establishment of the United Nations as a *gendarme* of the world which imposes world peace were considered ineffective. In the first instance this determined the decision of waging war to annihilate the Nazi Germany, but also a change of attitude towards the defeated by providing financial and logistical support for recovery. Step by step, even if it was completing a warlike attitude of the Truman doctrine, the Marshall Plan brought prosperity and political stability in the Western Europe. This can be considered the beginning. Much more important was to identify a context in order to support a stable dialogue

²We consider the presentation of the historical situation of Europe made by Hagen Schulze (1994), *Staat und Nation in der europäischen Geschichte*, München: Verlag C.H. Beck, very eloquent. Even though we do not entirely agree with what has been said, the overall picture clearly shows the complexity of establishing borders in Europe, regardless of the chosen criterion, and any revisionist attitude has determined and will continue to lead to armed conflicts.

³A very interesting review of the conceptual history on boundaries is the work edited by Allen Buchanan and Margaret Moore eds. (2003), *States, Nations and Border. The Ethics of Making Boundaries*, Cambridge University Press. The diversity and relativity of solutions in the context of the historical imperative that requires the identification of a universal one is to be noted.

and to create collaborative structures based on the principle of equality among the countries that only a few years ago were belligerent.

Possible solutions for such collaboration existed since the interwar period. Iconic in this case is the 1923 work of Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Pan-Europa* who wants to promote a united Europe on the principle of equality, without the existence of a dominant nation. It is seen as a solution to European problems, developed as a political emergence from within the countries involved. The European borders extend from the West of England to the East of Russia. If, in the case of England, everything was viewed from the point of view of collaboration or even unification, with Russia, instead, the relation could only be one of opposition.

Whether it was only regarded as a utopia or as a real project, the emergence of the European Union was done in accordance with the principles described in Coudenhove-Kalergi's work. Changes in attitudes and the evolution of close collaboration could be pursued step by step after 1949, when the Council of Europe was established, and in 1950 the German Federal Republic was already a member state. Even if this institution was conceived as a form of intergovernmental collaboration, it was the signal for a new beginning. Much more important was the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which had a supranational structure and was supposed to coordinate the coal and steel exploitation, considered to be fundamental for development in general, but also for the armaments industry. France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy and West Germany, which showed stabilizing relations and the attempt to resolve any future conflict, signed the Treaty of Paris in 1951.

First of all, further development has shown the positive elements of such collaboration. Structures have grown in complexity, and relationships have grown tighter. The Treaty of Rome which led to the European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) in 1957 was followed by the Treaty of Brussels (The Fusion Treaty 1965), the Schengen Agreement of 1985, the Single European Act 1986, The Treaty of Maastricht 1992, the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) the Treaty of Nice (2001) and the Treaty of Lisbon (2007). With the Treaty of Lisbon, a mature European Union with a broad legal

status (27 states) is outlined, with institutions adapted to the new conditions. The described evolution shows a positive evolutionary perspective based on the natural development of the European Union.

But it remains the question of what is the European Union: a form of intergovernmental collaboration, a supranational institution or a federal state? By analyzing the institutions and the functionality of the European Union, one of the three options can be considered as a reasonable answer. The existence of a Parliament, the European Commission, a President and the European Central Bank, as well as the idea of implementing legislation and a common foreign policy, all seem to involve the idea of a federal state. Similarly, the existence of the European Council and the Council of the European Union highlights the idea that the European Union is a form of intergovernmental cooperation. And last but not least through other institutions and our own Agencies we can talk about a supra-state entity that regulates the activity at the European level.

From our point of view any choice is a good one, although I would personally prefer that of a broad federal state. Any alternative would be a step back. However, the greatest evil is the existence of the trivial ambiguous structure, which by the way it acts gives the impression of uncertainty, ongoing adjustments and political indecision. The messages are ambivalent, everything seems possible and permissible, and by negotiation it is possible to obtain everything, and most seriously, national interests seem more important than the European ones. The gaining of the benefits prevails over the values that formed the foundation of the European Union, i.e. equality in decision-making and non-dominance of superpower as a state or group of states.

Self-consciousness of the European citizen: local, national, European, global

Faced with the ambiguous political message that we have previously noted, and a weak historical-political education existing in many EU countries briefings rigid and weak, the self-consciousness of the European citizen is divided and ambiguous determining several schizoid

opinions and attitudes in many situations. Does this citizen need a European self-consciousness? The answer is definitely yes. He is put in a position to vote for the European Parliament. By the way in which the Union's governing structures work the result, the vote that he gives to national elections directly influences the European policies. Under these circumstances, it is imperative that the voter be aware that he is part of an extended group called "European citizens", that his decision affects everyone, the impact is far beyond personal needs and that an unfortunate decision will affect not only those who live in the suburbs, but will also act as a boomerang on him.

Developing the consciousness of being a European citizen is an imperative for all the citizens of the European Union. However, is it a desirable achievement? First, to consider yourself a "European citizen" is unnatural. By nature, and in relation to a place, man has developed a dual consciousness: here and there. The same form is reflected in the self-consciousness: ego and alter-ego. From the combination of the two we realize that the first level of consciousness is "the local one", as my (ego) here, while, in opposition, what is elsewhere, belonging to the others (alter), we will generically call "global". From a psychosocial point of view, local consciousness is deeply affective, of immediate interest and of major personal importance. The consciousness of global membership is more complex. From a distance it develops towards a form of indifference, the interest is removed, and from a non-personal point of view, a form of neutral opposition. There is a change of attitude when the different as a representative of the global one directly interferes with the local element, causing the idea of opposition as a danger and the other being stigmatized as an enemy.

The local-global dichotomy is natural, profound and despite transformations on the economy and circulation of information, the perception remained the same at the individual level. Also, the general idea of globalization, referring to global inter-relationship, is not something new. Looking back, we see how population movements, goods and information are contemporary to the history of the world. In various ways, peoples have constantly come into contact with each other, supporting and strengthening the idea of having a major group. Increasing the degree of complexity of information has only amplified and

highlighted interactions, and they remain mainly dual: indifference or danger⁴. That is why we can conclude that at the level of individual consciousness there has always been a "there" along with an "alter-ego" that has determined global consciousness. Nevertheless, the feeling of belonging to the human species is weak, the global idea being more easily associated with the danger and the different, than with my close neighbour. In this context, much more popular will be the danger of globalization than the benefits of benefits.

Historically, in the local-global dichotomy alternatives representing more than the local and less than the global begin to occur. The inter-human interaction through direct human experiences leads to the emergence of two approaches, one centripetal and one centrifugal through which self-consciousness is restructured, determining an attitude of belonging or rejection in relation to a group. The village, the fortress has strengthened the sense of security, belonging and what can be assimilated to them is included in the centripetal current. In the same way we can integrate the similarities of language, traditions, clothes, origin etc. That is why the national state, which is an extended form of the fortress and is based on supporting the similarities, is part of the centripetal phenomenon. The centrifugal phenomenon is easy to follow in case of taxes, especially those coming from the center, as was the case with multi-ethnic imperial structures. These have been doubled by the differences between the local population and the ruling class, which has amplified the rejection, despite the fact that they have all been accompanied in many situations and by administrative or cultural benefits.

The internal hierarchy of the consciousness of belonging to the social group is natural, deeply rooted and very difficult to modify. There are personal and cultural-historical variations, but the fundamental features remain to be seen. The feeling of belonging to the group increases from the local to the global while the group's rejection falls to the global level. A person feels part of a living area, an ethnic group and / or nation

⁴We do not agree with the perspective of some fundamental transformations over the last twenty years regarding the perception of the global idea, by developing technology and speeding up communications (Arif Dirlik, 1996: pp. 21-45). Even if being in contact with a wide variety of cultural phenomena is real, giving up the local-global duality does not work at a deep level.

and much less part of a global area. European citizenship is considered similar to the global one and that is why we are generally indifferent to it but with a great potential for rejection. It is enough that EU membership affects us directly (through migration, taxes, or just manipulation), for euroscepticism to explode in accordance with the rejecting effect of global intrusion into the local, through the centrifugal phenomenon.

Instead of a Conclusion: the 2008 crisis and missing the opportunity to Union strengthening

Considering that the idea of being a European citizen does not involve deep affective perceptions and there is no willingness to make personal sacrifices for the purpose of maintaining the European Union, the messages sent by the European political leaders are very important. The economic crisis that started in 2008 represented for the European Union a turning point, the first real attempt to cope with the systemic construction of an undetermined inter- or supra- state entity. Promoting the ideas of tolerance, support, inter-state collaboration, doubled by the idea of mutual benefits in all decisions taken, all these had to be visible in all the approaches during the economic crisis. The common messages had to be coherent and focus on how the EU, and especially the Eurozone, would come out of the crisis much more easily through collaboration.

In reality, the sent messages were opposite. Instead of solidarity, each political leader sought to defend his national interest, instead of focusing on solutions, he sought causes and guilty. The restrictive monetary policy favored certain countries amplifying the crisis in others. Instead of being an asset to the euro, it was a disadvantage, with the public circulating the message that it is easier to pass through the crisis without the euro. The fact that the countries of Northern Europe (Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden) have a much easier crisis than the ones in the south (Italy, Spain, Portugal) have led to a segregation between the north and the south, completing that between East and West. The perception of EU partners has been negatively been

influenced by both sides: Southern citizens felt “betrayed” while those in the north as being “used for profit”.

A unique moment in which the principles of solidarity should have governed has been lost, and the European Union before the crisis disappeared. At the level of general perception, suspicion, distrust, fear of failure occurred. In this context, doubled by non-consolidation of the feeling of belonging to European citizenship, euroscepticism became something normal. And the fight against Euroscepticism was not brought about by new cohesion policies and the call to the values of solidarity, but rather by disposals at the level of integration, with ambiguous messages about the construction of economic walls within Europe. The purpose was the unexpected Brexit, materializing the ugly nightmares of the unity followers. This has not only shown that Euroscepticism can materialize, but it has been exemplified by one of the most important countries of the Union, favored in many of the negotiations for financial allocations.

Our view is that the only solution remains the return to pre-crisis optimism in terms of the continuous integration of the countries in the Union, the consolidation of relations, coherent policies of mutual support. All this can be done by disambiguating political messages, transmitting coherent signals on integration. Because it is difficult to naturally assimilate the idea of a European citizen, the political education and the awareness of historical boundaries can help to strengthen it and to build closeness and positive feelings. Europe has a future to the extent that today we are capable of building it, otherwise negative realities will far outweigh the human imagination, as every world war has already highlighted.

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